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"Why do you think young people leave Latvia?" asked DAS Boyer Latvian alumni.

Ambassador Garber congratulates Latvian Alumni with the newsletter's first issue

Welcome to your new Latvian State Alumni newsletter! Latvia has more than 500 alumni from various U.S. State Department-sponsored programs, and I am excited that we are launching this newsletter to provide an opportunity to help build a strong and long-lasting Latvian State Alumni community. Worldwide, there are more than 1,000,000 U.S. Department of State Alumni. This prestigious group includes world leaders, those who have achieved great things in their chosen field, and those who influence our daily lives in myriad ways. Among this global community are 47 Nobel Laureates, over 300 chiefs of state or heads of government, politicians, CEOs, teachers, authors, journalists, artists and many more outstanding individuals. As an alumnus/a of a State Department-funded exchange

program, you are part of a global community of the best and brightest.

Throughout the years, Latvian alumni have come together to launch a wide variety of projects related to education, the environment, culture and the arts. Alumni have also played an active role in many U.S. Embassy-sponsored events and have applied for opportunities to put their ideas to work through our small grants program.

We have enjoyed hearing about your remarkable and diverse experiences both in Latvia and in the United States, and this newsletter is going to be an opportunity for you to continue sharing your stories with your fellow alumni. The newsletter will also provide a forum for discussion on how you can become more involved, and will



offer opportunities for you to participate in Embassy-sponsored events as an expert, volunteer or guest speaker.

We appreciate your experience, your energy, and your enthusiasm, and we look forward to learning more about your future success stories and accomplishments. I wish you all the best.

Judith Garber, U.S. Ambassador to Latvia

Latvian Alumni Dine with Deputy Assistant Secretary Spencer P. Boyer

During his visit to Latvia, Deputy Assistant Secretary Boyer had dinner with United States exchange program alumni. Throughout the evening, those present enjoyed a lively discussion about multiculturalism and democracy in Latvia, as well as some of the challenges facing the country's future. Participants also reflected on their experiences in the U.S., sharing with DAS Boyer and Ambassador Garber anecdotes about how opportunities they found within the exchange program have influenced their personal and professional lives.



Spencer Boyer, who focuses on U.S. public diplomacy and public affairs, visited Latvia to participate in the Riga Conference. He had working meetings with various Latvian government officials and non-governmental organizations, and he also met with a group of undergraduate and graduate political science and communication students.

In addition, the Deputy Assistant Secretary met with bloggers and representatives of the new Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism, established by State alumna Inga Springe.

For more on Ms. Springe and the Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism, see page 3 of this newsletter.

Alumni Brainstorm about Community Engagement and Future Projects

Fulbright and TEA alumni gathered for a lunch to brainstorm the future activities of the Latvian State Alumni network. Together with U.S. Embassy representatives, the participants discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the alumni network.

In order to gauge interest in developing a strong network, the participants agreed to develop a survey designed to collect ideas from returned USG alumni.

The results of this survey showed that 99% of those surveyed appreciated the opportunity to read about local alumni activities, Embassy projects



and grant opportunities, and close to 80% of respondents are interested in becoming involved in Embassy activities as experts, volunteers or speakers. Many expressed interest in

sharing their experiences, as well as further opportunities to expand their professional contacts through the alumni network.

Several younger alumni also volunteered to be reporters for the newsletter, and to interview other alumni on their activities.

If you would like to share your experiences, update your contact information or offer any suggestions, then we want to hear from you!

Feel free to contact Alumni coordinator Andris Purvlicis at: PurvlicisA@state.gov or call 6710-7237.

Study of the United States Institutes

Are you a highly-motivated and experienced professional from an educational institution, research-based organization or think tank?

We have an excellent opportunity for you!

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Application deadline December 12, 2011

"The Republic of You" Children Design their own Embassy

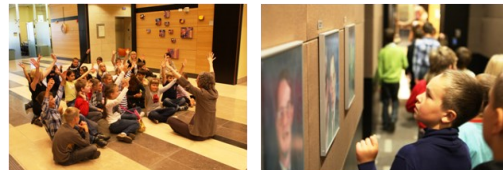
More than twenty 8 and 9 year old children from Riga Secondary School Number 34 visited the Embassy to work on a project to design their own embassies.

The children and their teachers toured the New Embassy Compound, and then spent time envisioning how they would design their own perfect Embassy. The children also had a chance to practice their English while describe their drawings to Public Affairs Officer, Amy Storrow.

"In my Embassy there will be a room for candy and ice-cream, a little zoo and a swimming pool with dolphins," observed 9 year old Polina.

"There will be a lot of tunnels and secret rooms in my embassy," explained 8 year old Alexander.

Children's drawings were displayed as part of an exhibition in honor of the 20th Anniversary of U.S.- Latvian diplomatic relations, which was organized in collaboration with 2010 TEA alumna Marina Grecanina.



Kristiana Bruzgule Shares her U.S. Experience

The Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellows Summer Institute is an intensive summer program for high-school students. By focusing on diplomatic relations and global issues through discussions, seminars, community service projects and other activities, the four-week institute promotes mutual understanding and an appreciation of diverse values between 60 fellows from 50 countries. In the interview below, **Kristiana Bruzgule** reflects on her experiences with the BFTF Program.

What was your contribution to the Benjamin Franklin Summer Institute?

"I was very proud to be the representative of Latvia, so I was determined to actively take part in this summer program. For example, during the Civic Engagement week I was a member of the Education and Child Welfare group. I was involved in different community service projects, such as organizing a fund-raising campaign for Haitian school and children camp visits, cooperating with the organization "Kiva", as well as visiting the elderly in the retirement house and participating in the "Fresh Market" campaign."

What were the most breathtaking moments?

"Every day brought unprecedented impressions, like the visit to the U.S. Department of State during which we actively discussed topics like US-EU relations and minority integration. I also enjoyed the academic seminars in



'Washington Center' and meeting representatives from 'The World Bank', 'Amnesty International' and the 'International Monetary Fund'. I had a good time at the baseball game on American Independence Day and exploring American culture with my host family visiting the National Whitewater Center. Needless

to say, there were many moments which left a deep impression on me."

What did you learn from the other fellows and people around you?

"I enjoyed sharing opinions in a culturally-enriched environment, looking at global issues from a wide range of perspectives and broadening my way of thinking – it was priceless! We learned from each other open-mindedness, initiative and a keenness to undertake challenges which help us to

do good for society."

How are you going to use your acquired experience?

"The fellows are now working as a 'Global Student Union'

and seeking to enhance how society understands its own values and make us all think both independently and globally. In our projects we have a chance to use our acquired knowledge in discussions to share the same goals with other communities all over the world."

What are your feelings after your summer experience?

"I am still at a loss for words. Life is so much better when you get to know the world beyond the borders of your city or country. This summer program opened my eyes to new life perspectives. I now see myself not only as a citizen of Latvia but of the entire world and I returned with some 'extra luggage' filled with irreplaceable memories, marvelous impressions and strong inner determination to raise awareness in society on the importance of bettering our community on a common path towards prosperity. I feel so grateful for having the chance to represent Latvia in BFTF, it has definitely been a life-changing experience for me."

**Humphrey Program Alumna establishes Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism**

The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism recently received \$10,000 from the U.S.-Baltic Foundation to finance two research projects. The first will investigate off-shore business and banking practices in the Baltic region, while the second will explore Russia's use of "soft power" in the Baltic states through its financial support of non-governmental organizations.

Based in Latvia, the Center is the first-ever independent non-profit investigative journalism center in the Baltics. It was launched in August 2011, to generate high-quality, accessible investigative reports, databases, and

contextual analysis with the focus on transparency and reform, with the goal of having a long-lasting impact on both



society more generally and its public officials particular. The center also seeks to inform international media and its audiences on political, social and financial issues present in the Baltic region. The center

was established by a group of alumni lead by [Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program](#) alumna Inga Springe of Latvia with support from the [Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund \(AEIF\)](#).

"In America I learned, that one has to take action instead of being afraid of what others might think and not be afraid of a failure. Of course, it is a bit scary as well, however the excitement is bigger and at

least for now I have a feeling that this work won't be in vain," explained Inga during her interview.

Watch full interview with Inga [here](#).

"In America I learned, that one has to take action instead of being afraid of what others might think .."

An American Fulbrighter's First Impressions of Latvia



I am delighted to be in Latvia and to have this great opportunity to come discover this part of the world. I am Ali Ait Si Mhamed. I have a PhD in International Comparative Education Finance. I graduated at the State University of New York at Buffalo, NY in 2007. My research work includes consultancy reports with World Bank, peer-reviewed manuscripts, a monograph, a series of book reviews, and several research presentations in national (i.e. in US) and international conferences. I am currently a Professor of Education at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY.

As a Fulbright scholar in Latvia at my host institution The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, my mission is primarily to lecture on research methods and to introduce Data-Driven Instruction (DDI) as an innovative instruction model seen by pedagogues as a paradigm shift in teaching and learning. Lecture plans include Research Methods instruction to different levels of Bachelor-level students at SSE Riga.

Here are a few seminars that have been scheduled for my Fulbright fellowship year:

- Multiculturalism and multicultural education for Attistiba University graduate and undergraduate social work students
- Online instruction: designing courses and teaching online scheduled for SSE Riga in November
- Finance of higher education with a lot of focus on case studies in this issues

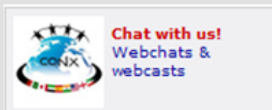
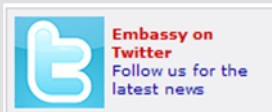
My professional contribution also includes involvement in research topics. We are currently engaged in investigating language policy and internationalization of higher education in the three Baltic States.

Beyond the scope of formal schedules of teaching and research, I have a few impressions I would like to share about the country of Latvia. It is quite impressive to notice how much Latvia's identity consists of its social structure, and also the extent to which traditions form the identity of Latvians in many ways. Latvians have a harmonic relationship with nature and that is very clear in their folk songs and their amazing attachment to the countryside. In fact in some informal conversations with students and colleagues, it is very noticeable that the countryside is a "refuge" from the burdens and the chaotic aspects of the city and also a source of relaxation.

Other aspects of Latvia's rich culture consist of its flower market, its accessible, affordable and reliable public transportation and finally its delicious salads, soups and crepes with *Piena Krejums*. These dishes have a unique taste that could stay with you the rest of your life. So, I better take some cooking lessons to have access to similar food home when I go back to the US!

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State Alumni is your global community: a dynamic and interactive networking experience for all past and current participants of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs.

Stay connected with your exchange experience and explore the various opportunities available to you from State Alumni. Find fellow alumni in your country and in all regions of the world. Share your ideas, learn from your fellow alumni and find out about alumni activities being implemented in communities the world over. Focus on your professional development by searching for job and grant opportunities, and post your résumé or academic articles. Prepare your research through State Alumni's Online Resource Center, and access over 20,000 U.S. and international periodicals, newspapers, and more!

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If you have stories to share, interesting ideas, suggestions, comments or questions we would like to hear from you. Feel free to email us at,

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or

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